

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER "NEWS"

57 Hartford Street -- Phone: 863-2507 -- Email: hszc108@yahoo.com -- Website: www.hszc.org -- Oct., 2007

NEW ZAZEN SCHEDULE

MORNING (Monday-Friday)

6:00am-6:55 Zazen - Sitting meditation
(with 5-minute interval for stretching)
6:55am-7:05 Short Morning Service

EVENING (Monday-Friday)

6:00pm-6:40 Zazen
6:40pm-6:50 Short Evening Service

SATURDAY MORNING

9:10am-9:50 Zazen
10:00am-11:00 Dharma Talk followed by tea & cookies

SUNDAYS and HOLIDAYS - Closed

INSTRUCTION:

By Appointment

Marginalized by Allen Balderson

"How are you doing?" a friend asks as she approaches me on the street. I respond, "Fine, thanks." We hug. She looks at me for a moment. Her smile disappears as she becomes more skeptical. "You look so thin," she continues. "Have you lost weight?"

My friends, acquaintances and relatives are well meaning, loving, compassionate, and, I believe, genuinely concerned. But some questions, especially when asked in that guarded, stepping-on-eggshells kind of way, make me feel disconnected from their world. I become a glaring part of the world of the chronically ill, the HIV walking wounded. It's uncomfortable and I feel marginalized.

The marginalization issue isn't new for me. I've been struggling with it for some time now. It arises relatively infrequently, but when it does I wonder if I'm in denial about my own health, or are my friends reaching the wrong conclusions because of my appearance?

I'm often torn as to how much detail I can give without sounding defensive. In terms of looking thin, I might try to unravel for my friends how this disease and the drugs HIVers load into their gullets every day can cause significant changes in the body. Take lipoatrophy for one -- a condition in which there is significant loss of fat in the limbs, face and derriere, which can lead to very low self-esteem. It is the scarlet letter of the HIV world. This direct approach, albeit honest, might be too much unwanted information.

Don't misunderstand, I do like it when my friends ask how I am. I need them to help me walk through this illness. So how does one show respectful concern without making it sound like a judgment? And how does the person with HIV accept that question or response, which might seem insensitive, without overreacting?

A zazen friend reminds me that that's where our dharma practice comes in. Whether you are the one inquiring or the person who is being inquired about, both parties should be able to accept open-ended questions, be open to responses without taking offense, without feeling responsible to take any further actions. It's a process of acceptance on both sides, particularly acceptance of change. We all are all trying to understand our conditions, life's alterations. Maybe I overreact because I haven't learned to embrace my own conditions as much as I think I have.

It would be better to just affectionately acknowledge some comments with a simple, "Thanks for your concern," and then move on. If further dialogue is necessary, then it can happen. William James, in his 1890 book, "The Principles of Psychology," observed, "The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook."

WANTED: Want to write for the newsletter, please drop an email to us at jim_shalkham@hotmail.com or Jennifer Birkett at jendo22@sbcglobal.net. THANKS!



Mimi Manning, Event Chair, introduces celebrated authors, David Schneider and Norman Fischer at the HSZC Fundraiser.



*The audience listens intently to the entertaining Zen stories.
(Photos: Rami Bushnaq)*

Hartford Street Zen Center's 25th Anniversary Celebration and Fundraiser

HSZC's gala event, held on Saturday, September 8th was an unqualified success judging by the ticket sales and the positive feedback received by the Board of Directors. Following a buffet dinner at Hartford Street Zen Center for the evening's sponsors, David Schneider (calligrapher and author of *Street Zen*) and Norman Fischer (poet, author and Senior Dharma Teacher at San Francisco Zen Center) spoke "In Conversation" remembering the early days when Hartford Street first came into being. There were many light-hearted and rarely heard stories about our founder, Issan Dorsey, as well as about Philip Whalen (poet and former abbot) told by the guest speakers and members of the audience. Many thanks to the event chairs, Mimi Manning and Albert Kaba, our Practice Leader, Myo Lahey, Board President, Julia Ten Eyck - and of course, to all of you, our volunteers and guests who truly did make the evening a success. With a grateful bow.

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Dana Paramita
by Rev. Jeffrey Schneider
Dharma Talk at HSZC August 2007

The *paramitas* are the so-called perfections of Buddhism. In most systems, there are six: *dana paramita*, the perfection of generosity; *sila paramita*, the perfection of ethical conduct; *kshanti*, the perfection of patience; *virya*, the perfection of energy or effort; *dhyana*, the perfection of meditation and *prajna*, the perfection of wisdom. What I would like to talk about this morning then is the first of these six, *dana paramita*.

The word *paramita* itself can be translated in one of several ways depending on how you parse the word. It can mean perfection or completion or completed, or it can mean going beyond. So sometimes with the perfection of wisdom, *prajna paramita*, we say wisdom beyond wisdom, sometimes the perfection of wisdom, or sometimes wisdom which has gone beyond.

Today though we're just going to talk about *dana*. And I suppose the easiest way to talk about *dana*, or to talk about anything, is to talk about it in terms of us. We enact our lives through body, speech and mind. So let's see how *dana* expresses itself in these three areas.

Let's begin with the *dana* of the body. The body of course means not just this (patting his chest) collection of skin and organs and bones and things, but the entire material world as well. So in *dana* of the body, we can give things, we can give food or money or clothing or presents or what have you, to people who need them. Alms if you will. And that of course is a good thing. But there's also the *dana* of the body which is just showing up, to bring our bodies to the world. Just showing up whether we feel like it not, whether we're well or ill, when we'd rather be at home, to just show up where we say will, to be with people, to be with friends, family, Sangha mates, not to turn away, to bring our body to this place and just show up. This can be *zazen* or service, or showing up for work, showing up for our friends, showing up for our partners, physically showing up, being here. And with it we bring the body's gift of time. It is so much easier to give money than time. I think we all know that when we write a check for our favorite charity. But time is another gift of the body that we can give even when we don't have money. It may be time spent hammering nails with Habitat for Humanity or it can be time taken with a friend over a cup of coffee. This is the *dana* of the body, the body's gift of time. And the body's gift of work. We work together; we make things. This beautiful *zendo* is the work and effort of many people coming together to make it so. They have created a sacred space for us. Many, many people have come together to allow us to be here today. This is the *dana* of the body, the *dana* of work.

There is also the body's gift of pleasure. And this can mean many things. It can mean sexual pleasure. It can mean the pleasure of creating a meal together and eating. It can mean the pleasure of giving a friend a shoulder rub. All of this is the *dana* of the body---the body giving pleasure. Because Buddhism is originally an ascetic sort of practice, I think we under-rate pleasure; and yet pleasure is one of the ways we can give to each other. And if we can do this gracefully, without attachment, without expecting anything back, it can be a wonderful gift. The pat on the shoulder, the kiss on the cheek, a little shoulder rub, whatever. Just the presence of the body, bodies meeting each other in space. This is the body's gift of pleasure to the body.

And of course, the body also brings with it old age, sickness and death and these can be turned into gifts as well. I don't know if anybody other than Myo or I had the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Suzuki, Suzuki-roshi's wife and later widow. She lived with us many years at City Center. Then she went back to Japan; she's still alive, I think in her 90s. Okasan. One of the things she said, I heard, when she went back to Japan was

that she wanted to give her daughter the gift of her being there when she died. So she was giving her daughter the gift of her death. Some people give us the gift of their illness and allow us to take care of them. Sometimes we give others the gift of our illness and allow them to take care of us. Sometimes in our old age, or in our parent's or our friend's old age, we can give them this gift. To transform the suffering of the body into gifts. This morning I was sitting and there was somebody on the street screaming and his screaming at first was this visceral "ACKKKK!" Later he started screaming in words, "You bloody whore, I hope you die." And we were sitting *zazen*. This kind of gift is hard to accept. The gift of another's suffering. How can we hold it? We held it in the circle of our *zazen*. There was nothing else to be done.

Old age, sickness and death ... pleasure, time, work. Renunciation is also a gift of the body. Suzuki-roshi said that, renunciation is not giving things up so much as it is as realizing that they change. We're in this to let go of grasping. The Buddha talked about suffering, that suffering is inherent in all things. Suffering is inherent in the five *skandhas*, which are form, feeling, perceptions, karmic formations and consciousness. (This is just one way of looking at what constitutes us as persons.) He said the five *skandhas* affected by clinging are suffering, not that the five *skandhas* in and of themselves are suffering. So when we cling there is suffering. When we do not cling, there is gracious giving-up, there is *dana*. You know, it's funny --- when we see a beautiful sunset or a flower, we don't usually cling to it because we know it's the nature of the sunset to be gone in 5 or 10 or 15 minutes, the nature of the flower to die or fade in a day or two. And so instinctively we don't cling to them. But we cling to the other things in our lives: people, places, and things, situations, ideas, circumstances, that we think are going to give us continuous, on-going pleasure or happiness. And that's not the way to accept the gift of pleasure, the gift of bodies, the gift of the body of the world. We accept the gift of the body of the world, the *dana* of the world, by letting it go.

One of the titles of the Buddha is Tatagatha. It is usually translated as, "He who thus comes" or "He who thus goes." But I like to translate it as, "The guy who shows up." The Tatagatha is the guy who shows up. Suits up and shows up. Basically it can be a business suit, it can be a chef's hat, it can be a Muni uniform, a nurse's uniform, a Mom's uniform, whatever. You suit up and you show up. Showing up, showing up, showing up. This is the body's gift of *dana*.

***** To be continued in next issue.

2-Day Grief & Loss Workshop: Being Present in Difficult Times Facilitated by Zen practitioners: Diane LeVan and Cynthia Kear

Date/Time: Saturday, October 13, noon-5 p.m. and
Sunday, October 14, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
at Hartford Street Zen Center

Grief and loss are implicit to impermanence. How do we stay present when they enter our lives? How can we practice with these great teachings? Together, we will explore grief and loss from both a practice and psychological perspective.

Register with Cynthia at 415-586-6660, ckear@aol.com or Diane 415-810-6990, platelady@sbcglobal.net. Enrollment is limited to 15 participants. Suggested donation: \$40.

THANKS: to the Revs. Dave Haselwood, Michael McCormick, Jeffrey Schneider, and Jana Drakka and to Laura Burges for their Dharma talks.